

Camp San Juan Island

San Juan Island
National Historical Park

National Park Service
Department of the Interior



If you traveled the 13-mile military road from English Camp in the late 1860s and climbed one of the large firs behind you, this is what you would see on arrival to Camp San Juan Island (as American Camp was known for most of its existence). The parade ground (1) before you was a vital element in the life of the post and the focus of military activity from 1860 to 1874.

From dawn until dusk, soldiers drilled, chopped wood, hauled water, or scoured the barracks (2). All was viewed with a critical eye from officers' row (3), where front porches were oriented toward the post instead of the sea. Most of the buildings, including the surviving officers' quarters (4) and guardhouse (5) were shipped from Fort Bellingham by Capt. George E. Pickett in 1859/1860.

As today, 19th century army camps functioned as small cities with hospitals (6), cook houses (7), telegraph offices (8), carpenter shop (9), wash house (10), school (11) and bake house (12). The camp did not hold up well. By 1867, the commander begged for a new barracks roof and new officers quarters. The Secretary of War denied all such requisitions.

